Semiotics of Art: Language of Architecture as a Complex System of Signs

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ABSTRACT

This article examines art in the semiotic aspect. The aim of research is to identify the specificity of the language of architecture as a special form of symbolic art meaning the process of granting the symbolic value of aesthetic phenomena caused by the cultural and historical context allowing transmitting the values represented at the level of artistic activity. Research concept is determined by the understanding of art as a specific socio-cultural system operating various sign formations that include the elements of both simple - signals, and more complex nature like signs and their systems as well as symbols forming the most difficult class of sign formations. The use of the dialectical method for considering a thing in the unity and diversity of its properties allows revealing the specifics of the language of art. It is shown that architecture is a complex hierarchical system where different classes of characters are represented. The result of the study is in identifying the multi-layer system of architectural semantics indicating the diversity of architectural signs.

Introduction

An increasing interest in the semiotic problems is demonstrated in contemporary world of culture reflecting contradictory aspects of life through the language means. Culture, representing a special being, appears in the form of artificial environment created by the mankind for thousands of years and characterized by using specific symbols that lead to the creation of language. Thus, symbolization of culture defines symbolization of life. Moreover, the person is represented in the world of symbols. Due to the fact that the signs and symbols have a significant impact on the perception of the world by the knowing subject, the language as a means of knowledge transfer is of

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particular interest for the philosophical epistemology (Chistyakova, 2005; Chistyakova, 2010). Furthermore, the language, in view of its complex organization is in the center of interest for the complex of disciplines (it is studied by linguistics, logics, rhetoric and other disciplines), each of which prefers to explore its own language dimension; in particular, semiotics has been studying the sign representation of the language of culture. The urgency of turning to the study of questions dealing with the nature of art brings to life the needs of the society in updating the world of existing values.

Architecture as a sign system begins to be treated by analogy with the language system. Ferdinand de Saussure (1997) is one of the first ones to show the parallel between the city and the language system. In pursuit of analogy, the syntactic, morphological, pragmatic and sign structure is formed. The debates about dialects, idiolects and even architectural speech sociolects are hold. The question of "language barriers" in comprehension is raised and actualised on a larger scale in modern architecture. Structuralist dimensions of language are applied to the allocation of syntagmatic and paradigmatic sense levels. The historical and cultural significance is certainly important, it is, by the way, the basis for conferring an architectural monument status to the building, but it is no less important how architectural work determines people`s behavior. Behavioral model of architectural semiotics and E. Hall`s (1966) proxemiotics develop on its basis studying the patterns of perception and awareness of social space as well as of human behavior in this space. Semantics of proxematic sign, unlike the semantics provided by the behavioral model, is poorly studied. It is possible to permit the allocation of distant semantics defining comfortable and uncomfortable space exploration.

Analogy with the language functions leads to the formation of the functional model (Jakobson, 1958). In general, the use of the linguistic semiotic tools for architecture (Herman, 1982) caused extensive discussion among art theorists, practicing architects and even linguists. U. Eco (1980), who singled out seme, sign and figure in the architectural sign, also participated in it. Postmodernist discourse reveals an extremely wide communicative potential in architecture (Eisenman, 2003; Wigley, 1995) and opens the possibility for quotation, allusion, reminiscences. A particular interest of contemporary domestic science of culture is aimed at identifying the ontological foundations of art, which is a special information system containing a developed structure of images. The view that artistic activity aims to create a system of images by means of specific tools fixing the idea of the work of art is recognized in Russian art criticism (Berger, 1997; Kim, 2008; Lotman, 2010; Shcherbinin 2005; Chistyakova & Bogomyakov, 2014; Torshilova, 1985).

Modern science of art is forming a view on its symbolic nature. Thus, O.A. Ovsyannikova (2016), treating art as a specific cultural reality, notes that art allows to perceive and understand the multifaceted experience of human relations, embodied in various genres of art through a figurative system. Art and its language form the study object for the Russian semiotics of art, which has developed the understanding of the sign nature of the musical language and design language (Lazutina & Lazutin, 2015a). In particular, design language is seen as a multifunctional phenomenon that affects the formation of the art view of the world with the complex of specially selected means of expression (visualisation) (Lazutin & Lazutina, 2016). In the domestic cultural thought architecture is understood as a social and cultural phenomenon transmitting aesthetic values through various sign systems, reflecting the style of thinking characteristic for a particular historical epoch. Therefore, it is stated that the language of architecture has a special cultural value and represents an exceptional artificial language, incorporating sign systems of different kinds of art in its structure (Lazutin & Lazutina, 2016). M.N. Shcherbinin (2005), identifying the features of art in the genesis of meaning making,

notes that the images and symbols of architectural creativity play a key role in the history of art, man`s intellectual genesis, and architecture itself serves as "the most robust and reliable keeper of social memory" (Shcherbinin, 2005).

Methods

The study of language issues of architecture as a social and cultural phenomenon is at the core of this work. Appeal to the identification of the semantic nature of the language of architecture

leads to the analysis of the functions performed by this type of art in the life of the individual and society as a whole. Research concept is determined by the interpretation of the language of art as a special form of symbolic art, i.e. the process of granting symbolic value to the aesthetic phenomena influenced by the cultural and historical context, transmitting the world of values represented at the level of artistic activity. The language of architecture is a form of the language of art.

Research methodology is based on the use of semiotic approach in relation to the language of art. It seems rather promising in contemporary science of art despite the fact that the problem of symbolic culture was previously investigated in the philosophical works of ancient, medieval, modern European and contemporary authors, but today there are still unsolved questions, in particular, understanding the nature of the language of art and language of architecture as its specific type in the light of sense creation.

Results

This study is focused on the study of the formation and functioning of sign systems in the field of artistic creation. While investigating the nature of artistic activity it was found out that art has a special language. The analysis of onto-epistemological foundations of the language of art led to the understanding of symbolism as a basic principle of artistic creation that entailed an in-depth study of symbol creation in the language of art. In connection with it, the study of the specificity of the sign, sign systems and symbolic formations operating in the art, seems timely. A particular interest of this work is in the search for the semantic specificity of the language of architecture.

Art is seen as part of the modern Russian science from the position of information approach allowing to interpret the artistic image as the text, some message, endowed with multifarious meanings. Thus, it turns out that communication is carried out through the language of art. It becomes possible due to specially selected range of artistic means of expression allowing people, using the forms coded by a specific language, orientating in physical and cultural environment, as well as consolidating the systems of ideas and values created by the society (Lagodina, 2002).

The concept of symbolic art has its own history. The genesis of language means of art persuasion in the presence of basic formula in the creation of works of art in general, and architecture, in particular, that is associated with the idea of beauty synthesis, good and necessity, being realized through the history of culture, which reflects the struggle of new and innovative techniques. But despite the variety of genres and styles of art, adherence to the principle of symbolism remains unshakeable in the artistic creation. In other words, the content of the signs created by the artist is cumulative, since the elements of the new knowledge relate to the previously accumulated information. It can be argued that the symbols are constructed in a particular historical period and depend on its characteristics (traditions, such as the

ruling ideology, etc.), but at the same time they are also spreading in different historical periods of time, functioning in the same capacity (symbol).

In this paper, a symbol is referred to a sign that has a figurative meaning (second), characterized by the universal significance.

The process of symbolization in art is based on the adherence to the canonical, which is manifested in the use of special artistic techniques, forms, aimed at preserving traditions, and it is also based on the modernization, adding a special dynamism to the artistic image. Thus, a balance of tradition and modernization is created in the art and reflected at various degrees in the works of different historical eras. It should be noted that the transfer of knowledge on the stylistic preferences of the author of the art piece, the specifics of his methods of work with the material, etc. are particularly necessary in the formation of professional culture of the future art figures. Hence, for example, modern architectural education includes knowledge of the history formation of architectural schools, trends and directions, so "interweaving new methods and techniques into the process of training of architects has a great conceptual significance for the disclosure of the creative potential of the future expert" (Prohorov, 2012).

Discussions

As a language system, architecture is included into genre, stylistic, plot-arranging dimension. In its decorative (in the terminology of A. F. Losev) symbolism one may detect the traits of national character (Russian log huts, related to the concepts of quiet family happiness; Colosseum, reminding Roman greatness and acting as a symbol of governmental power; archaeological sites in India reveal the elements of architectural buildings, spotted with the symbolism of fruiting and propagation of plants relating to the cult of trees and attitude to motherhood in the harappa culture), the spirit of the era (for example, medieval architecture significantly differs from the Renaissance one that allows making conclusions on the historicity of the architectural language) , mindsets of entire cultures (it is not accidental that postmodernists diagnosed modernist rational forms with depression).

Thus, to apply semiotic tools to architecture means to allow semantic content in in. Meaning invested into the construction is seen as primarily utilitarian, but a variety of forms, distinguishing the epochs, culture, cities, and even neighboring houses contains personal, social and general cultural idea of beauty. And the meaning of architectural work is harder than habitual for us literary, sculptural or artistic tandem "creator-recipient".

Even G.V. Gegel (1971) remarked this feature: "The sculptor and artist conceive their work and fully implement it themselves" while the architect needs a "diversely branched craft activities". This leads to the extensive involvement of other people, already at the stage of designing the possibilities for interpreting the plan. In fairness, it is necessary to indicate the hypothetical possibility of modern architect, knowing the basics of using software simulation and 3D-press, to cope on his/her own.

But representing one epoch and culture, the architect and builders pass through their works similar cultural and historical meanings. The subject of such an architectural narrative was defined by Vitruvius already in the I century BC. Architectural images reveal the idea about useful, durable and beautiful. Each component in the sign system is represented with deep cultural and historical content. The semantic dimension of the architectural sign was traditionally built around functionality, formality and reliability. It is difficult to imagine an architectural work created only "for the sake of art." Architects have never built obviously useless objects. Dams were constructed where there were frequent floods, high walls protected

disputed territories, temples were built when the prayer was the most important action in human life, and social clubs - when there was an urgent need to organize a secular leisure. This is the reason why rural clubs in Russian bear not only an ideological imprint of the Soviet past, but also reflect historical needs of the population (even today it is possible to find Lenin`s portraits, and red corners, and projectionist booth).

The concept of durability in architecture consists in the selection of material, compositional formation of structure, insulation technologies, steam and water proofing. Obeying fashion and paying tribute to the development of science, architects turned to a variety of materials (clay, stone, brick, wood, etc.), each year improving their understanding of durable, reliable and comfortable place.

Thus, architecture can be viewed as a system of signs that refer to the values: if Vitruvius points at the importance of durability, then comfort categorically includes durability, but it has subordinated it to convenience. And some modern architectural solutions often displace durability in favor of common idea of comfort.

The structure cannot be considered a work of art without beauty. Of course, the specificity of architectural utilitarianism perceives it primarily as comfort due to which the building becomes a House (animated and spiritualized). There is a stylistic diversity of ideas about comfort. Taking into account the ubiquity of historic religious buildings, a priority of anthropological content in architectural decisions can be added (assuming, of course, that a person is involved in the design). It should be noted that the consumer connects the genius of the architect with insight enabling the artist to learn the customer`s needs better (in the novel "The Fountainhead" by Ayn Rand, a character Rand being an architect feels hard in his creative development due to it).

Correlation of the art piece with the world of the artist, his individual style and talent actually has an aesthetic aspect, based on the creative outcome outside personal space boundaries into social. The architect is capable and responsible for the formal and spatial appearance of the quarter, city, country, and epoch. The look reflects social attitude of people that fill this space. The architect is responsible for the aesthetic connection between the function and form. Their harmony contains sublime and low, beautiful and ugly, profane and sacred. For example, a brilliant architectural solution served high vaulted ceilings in the medieval churches that provided angelic choir sound and emphasized herewith a sublime and sacred character of performing action.

An important semantic element encoded in the architectural sign is the relationship between man and nature. The structure can imitate nature which may be a consequence of the recognition of the vital force of plants (in the columns it is easy to see the trunks of trees, in the painting of architectural monuments, for example, belonging to ancient India it is easy to guess jungle vegetation). Urban culture sometimes seems pointedly artificial and even unnatural and over natural (how can be assessed the whole quarters of China's major cities, for example). Or one may encounter with the harmony of urbanism and nature, a good secretly recognized example is the Central Park in New York. In the history of architecture one can come across a large-scale attempt to subdue nature to human intentions. This is a so-called green or park architecture. Landscape arrangements, ornament, planned «green zone» (mandatory in modern building) are just telling us of the relationship between man and nature on the whole - of his accession, conquest, destruction and creation.

Modern architecture often finds a mismatch between the plan of expression and the plan of perception. A new solution is always a challenge to the public and a "wonder" that attracts tourists with its uniqueness. Postmodernists found a deep discursive potential in the architectural archetype, symbolism and contextuality. Thus, a modern architectural product offers its own rules of understanding. Perhaps, this is

the reason why modern buildings often seem tasteless and eclectic. The language of traditional architecture (which is, by the way, not taught at school) differentiated the

building on major and minor importance, public and personal (for example, height, massiveness, columned backups, wide window openings, preference of stone to wood (or vice versa). The change of perceptions about durability, wide possibilities of new construction materials and technologies, radically changed functionality of social institutions shakes the foundations of spatial perception.

"Dancing House" of the insurance company in Prague (Czech Republic), "Crooked House" in Sopot (Poland), the Branson museum (known as the House of Ripley) building in Liverpool, well-known as the "Turning place" attract tourists with the violation of the notions of durability, weight ratio and the volume of constructions. These structures refer the recipient not only to the Vitruvius`s usual triad, but also to the children's tale, literary or cartoon fantasy. Inverted pyramid and home, "inside out" houses destroy familiar ideas on functionality. Harmony and symmetry, geometric decorativeness are discarded with bold and bizarre constructions which shape resembles a mushroom, berry, drop, cake, hole, cone with ice cream and so on.

As contemporary art in general, architecture is interested in the form, breaking traditional canons and principles. Effect is at the forefront of design and architectural tasks. But the changed social reality and a new language are already correlating in the new harmony of form and function. In our opinion, these are fundamentally different relationships. The classical approach embedded art organization of the functional structure; non-classical - artistically arranges prevailing social space or even organizes a new one. Queer buildings become favorite places for flash mobs, wedding, friendship or family photo shoots, or tourist excursions. Aiming to create the effect, modern architecture has developed a system of signs by which it can talk about dreams, phobias, complexes, hobbies, art worlds, whims and fantasies (of the artist or the customer) that feeds the social myth-making. Therefore, the language expression plan of modern architecture is becoming richer and symbols turn deeper and more allusive. And it is symptomatic that the divergence of interpretations has become more ambitious.

Conclusion

The language of art is a specific text, in the semantic field of which appears an extensive system of images, characterized by ambiguity. Aesthetic information in art is created and transmitted by the complex of expression means.

The language of art is a system cultural object. This is a hierarchical system filled with a variety of characters and their formations. Symbols that are the most difficult from the view of sign creation play a special role in the process of constructing the meaning in art; it allows them to transfer a large amount of semantic information.

Symbolic nature of art language is the most important epistemological problem of learning the mechanisms of forming the meanings and values in culture. A variety of symbols used in art in general and in architecture, in particular, can be typologized. It is possible to assume that the symbols of so-called "image" and "expression" function in art (Lazutina & Lazutin, 2015a).

Symbols (according to the reality reflection) can be "iconic" (symbols of imitation of qualities, properties, events and objects, symbols for encoding of external form, perspective, space, depth) and "expressive" (a complex of "psychological Symbols") (Lazutina & Lazutin, 2015a). The following symbols may be used in architecture: "rational and logical" (symbols of abstract phenomena, philosophical categories, geometric shapes: cross, square, dot, circle) and "emotional" symbols; "intelligible" and

"sensible", "real" and "unreal" symbols (fantastic creatures) (Lazutina & Lazutin, 2015b).

Applying a typology of sign by Y.B. Borev (2005) to art, it is proposed to distinguish between the following types of symbols (taking as a basis of classification a character and purpose of the operation): symbols of belonging to culture; symbols of the epoch, directions, style; symbols of national specificity; symbols reception expectations; functional symbols and others (Lazutina & Lazutin, 2015b). Modern architecture offers a complicated symbolism which is based on the postmodern hint (Jencks, 1977; Hall, 1966; Herman, 1982). Already in the first half of the XX century A. Uittik (1960), adapting a functional model of R. Jakobson (1957), highlighted a meta architectural function which is perceived as a quotation or allusion in the modern city (above all) environment. Architects bravely try to organise social space, illustrating fairy tales; embodying artists` drawings (a "Crooked House" in Poland); build "places of memory" devoted to tragic events ("Dancing House" in Prague on the site of the bombing).

The triumph of science and technology is a commonly used expression plan of the architectural symbol (building-robot in Bangkok, airport-island in Japan), the greatness of engineering thought like in the destroyed Twin Towers, or the triumph of luxury in the queer Dubai hotels. Thus, the world of art is characterized by a variety of symbols and acts as a collection of material and spiritual values created by man. Architecture uses a rich "arsenal" of the sign formations; this is a symbolic world that functions both as simple (signals) and complex (signs, their complexes and symbols) sign formations.

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